DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 185 587 CS 205 506

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TITLE Critical Listening Activities: A First Step in Language Arts.
PUB DATE [79]
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Language Arts; *Learning Activities; *Listening Comprehension; Listening Habits; *Listening Skills; *Oral Language; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Four activities are suggested to develop student appreciation for the relationships between listening and the other language arts. The activities are designed to improve on present classroom instruction, which usually provides little time for formal oral language instruction. Each activity begins with some aspect of oral language training and proceeds to reading and writing instruction. The titles of the activities reflect their specific emphasis within oral language development: "Describe Me Well" (giving oral directions), "What Did Ya Hear?" (developing critical listening skills), "Sum of This and Sum of That" (summarization), and "Imagine Me Today" (expressive language in creative dramatics and the development of images). What should be evident in using these activities is the need for more direct instruction in oral language skills and the importance of these skills within the scope of language arts instruction. Hearing without listening must be replaced by listening which is active, questioning, critical, and evaluative. (RL)

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CRITICAL LISTENING ACTIVITIES:

A FIRST STEP IN LANGUAGE ARTS

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Tuning-out through selective listening represents one of the more advanced skills practiced by many of today's students. If instruction is viewed as only maginally relevant, it may become the victim of selective tuning-out. At some point in our teaching we have all become aware of how frequently students choose to attend to their own dreams and concerns rather than to our offerings. Are there methods to break the cycle of selective listening when it becomes continuous? Are there ways to encourage active, critical and evaluative listening? Are ways available to improve questioning practices? The first step in addressing these questions might be to employ more highly developed and practiced language modes - speaking and listening - and to integrate these with reading and writing activities.

The relationship between reading and listening has been studied in numerous ways (Duker, 1968). Lundsteen(1971) concluded from her review of several research reports that reading instruction will not necessarily improve listening performance although both reflect receptive language abilities. On the other hand, direct instruction on listening skill tends to result in higher reading achievement scores (Lundsteen, 1971).

The results of comparing reading and listening abilities change during the first six years of schooling. Oral language is generally more proficient in grades one through five. Later, reading equalls, then surpasses listening in grades six through twelve. Even with low functioning adults, reading appears to be more proficient than listening for transmitting information (Fitzgerald, 1975). One the positive side, oral language tends to be an appealing mode of instruction and creates an open, accepting attitude for communication (Botel and Dawkins, 1973).

The purpose of this paper is to suggest activities which integrate the many aspects of language arts instruction. These activities represent only a small number of possible lessons combining speaking, listening, reading and writing instruction and are used only to whet the reader's interest for further study.

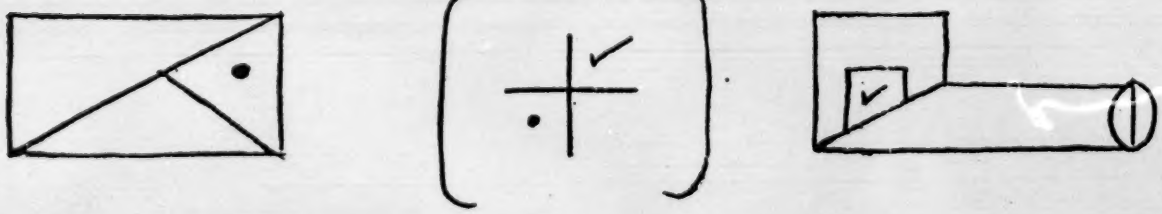
The activities outlined in this paper hopefully will combat our present program of classroom instruction which provides little time for formal oral language instruction. This may be the result of teachers assuming that speaking and listening skills develop naturally. However, around us we see the effects of low performance in oral language skills and the need to integrate the expressive and receptive language arts: speaking, listening, reading and writing.

ACTIVITY I "DESCRIBE ME WELL!"

Giving directions is difficult for all of us, but few middle school students even realize the problems and techniques involved in both giving and hearing accurate directions.

PURPOSE: To assist teams of students in using directional words, giving and receiving accurate directions.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Design six geometric shapes on large sheets of cardboard which increase in difficulty (complexity) as in the following examples:



PROCEDURES: Divide the class into two teams and have each team select a "receiver" of the directions. Team members will alternate in the roles of describing the design for the "receiver" to draw on the chalkboard. The students giving oral directions are not allowed to use their hands nor express negative comments about the "receiver" (e.g. "That's not what I told you!" or "Listen to me, will ya!") The class is shown the target shape while the receiver attempts to draw the shape from the oral directions. A class discussion follows to analyze more accurate directions and the procedures used.

VARIATIONS:

a) After the class becomes proficient with oral directions, the class should be directed to give written directions.

b) The class might compile a list of direction words and phrases (e.g. left-right, directly above, place your finger on....,) for future reference.

ACTIVITY 2 "WHAT DID YA HEAR?"

Since we spend considerable amounts of time listening to TV for our news, activities which increase our critical listening abilities should be included in our instructional program.

PURPOSE: To develop critical listening abilities through the use of a questioning procedure (Tovey, 1979).

MATERIALS NEEDED: Select three newspaper stories which represent differing lengths, information and organizational patterns.

PROCEDURES: Select a student leader to read one story as a newsc ster

might on television. The students are to write questions which come to mind after hearing the story and which are un-answered by the report. The least difficult report, usually the briefest as well, should generate the largest number of questions while the most complete report will provide more infomation but will be the most difficult to recall.

Ask selected students to recall relevant information and to identify how the report was organized (e.g. cause/effect, time, contrast, listing). Next have a discussion of un-answered questions followed by the second listing of additional information remembered through the use of questions.

VARIATIONS:

a) Direct students to write a recall of facts, as well as, un-answered questions.

b) Begin by reading the title of a report and have students generate questions they expect to be answered in the report.

ACTIVITY 3 "SUM OF THIS AND SUM OF THAT"

The ability to accurately summarize is one which most students find difficult to achieve and many teachers find difficult to teach. Summarizing what is heard is a logical first step in teaching students to produce written summaries.

PURPOSE: To provide instruction on the use of key words (Connors and Fitzgerald, 1978) and organizational patterns as a tool in summarizing.

MATERIAL NEEDED: Select approximately six paragraphs which include various organizational patterns (e.g. listing, contrast, time, cause/effect)

and aids to hearing or seeing these patterns (e.g. first, in summary, by contrast, in addition). The organizational pattern is clearly evident in the first two paragraphs while the pattern is more difficult to identify in the last two paragraphs.

PROCEDURES: Have one student read aloud a single paragraph for a small group of students. All team members orally identify the key words and words signaling the organizational pattern. Each team composes a one or two sentence summary of the paragraph. Class discussion then follows to analyze the most critical key words, signal words and summary sentence.

VARIATIONS:

a) The same procedure maybe followed using passages rather than single paragraphs.

b) Following the reading of a paragraph, students might be asked either to fill-in or generate a structured overview representing the paragraph.

ACTIVITY 4 "IMAGINE ME TODAY"

To better recall what is read or heard, creating clear images is a most effective device for students. Activities which have numerous correct interpretations provides a forum for creative dramatics and the development of images.

PURPOSE: To develop students' expressive language in words and body movements (Finn and Petty, 1976).

MATERIAL NEEDED: Compose a series of sentences which may be interpreted in several ways and which may be dramatized by students:

My first recollection as a child is of a wet diaper.
(mine, baby brothers)

Jill stepped slowly toward the center of the stage.
(fear, darkness, reminiscing)

While sitting in a dentist's office, many thoughts go through my mind.

PROCEDURE: Divide the class into teams. Each team receives four sentences which are different from other teams'. Direct them to discuss ways to interpret each sentence and how to dramatize it for the class. Each team acts out without words two or more ways of interpreting a single sentence, the basic idea of which the class tries to guess. Points are awarded for accurate interpretations and for guessing the "idea" in the basic sentence.

VARIATIONS:

a) The students might compose their own sentences to be dramatized.

b) A list of five key words might form the basis of different stories composed by individual teams to be dramatized.

In summary, the four activities suggested in this paper focused on the relationship among listening, speaking, reading and writing as integrated language arts. Each begins with some aspect of oral language training and proceeds to reading and writing instruction. What should be evident is the need for direct instruction on oral language skills and their importance within the scope of language arts instruction. Hearing without listening must be replaced by listening which is active, questioning, critical and evaluative.

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